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Written on September 15, 2015 at 6:00 am by [svanderwerff](#)

## Pacific Partnership 2015: A personal look at conducting the Coastal Medicine Initiative in Da Nang, Vietnam

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*By Cmdr. Lisa Kelty, Mass Casualty Director for Pacific Partnership 2015 aboard USNS Mercy*



From May-September 2015, I was deployed as an emergency medicine physician on board the hospital ship [USNS Mercy \(T-AH 19\)](#) in support of [Pacific Partnership 2015 \(PP15\)](#).

PP15 was a remarkable collaboration of multiple military and non-military organizations such among the U.S. Navy, Royal Australian Navy, University of Hawaii, Project Hope, and U.S. governmental agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development. It is the largest U.S. humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) mission in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Mercy visited the countries of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Vietnam. My involvement as the mass casualty director in this mission has not only surpassed my professional expectations, but epitomizes exemplary teamwork.

In Vietnam, Vietnamese emergency response personnel of 115 (similar to the U.S. 911 response) and Mercy staff participated in a coastal medicine initiative (CMI) event, consisting of a 10-day evolution of training in prehospital care and natural disaster injuries, as well as disaster response planning. The final and ultimate test of the CMI was a large drill consisting of Vietnamese and Mercy staff responding to a scenario driven tsunami disaster. Casualties were extracted from a simulated abandoned building in Da Nang. The casualties were stabilized in a field hospital and then medevac'd by Vietnamese "hot" ambulances and Vietnamese rescue boats to the anchored USNS Mercy for further definitive care.

The drill continued on board Mercy with 20 simulated casualties (U.S. and Vietnamese moulaged victims) that presented complex injuries, some requiring operative intervention. It was the ultimate demonstration of teamwork by Vietnamese and Mercy staff first responders, physicians, nurses and corpsmen. The magnificent attention to detail in the face of a complex drill was a sight to behold. The drill also included a simulated helicopter medevac on the flight deck of Mercy.

The professionalism and "can do spirit" of both countries is the adrenaline or stuff that successful disaster response is made of. The drill was described as "outstanding" by the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, Ted Osias, who witnessed the response each step along its course. In addition, the Army Surgeon General of Vietnam, Vietnamese Minister of Health, and a representative from the Vietnamese Department of Foreign Affairs personally viewed highlights of the response.

In my opinion, the drill was well executed, and the professionalism of the team of Vietnamese and Mercy staff was nothing short of remarkable. The Vietnamese Department of Foreign Affairs has concluded that the event was the earmark for future disaster preparedness collaboration and has already requested a larger disaster response drill with the U.S. and Vietnam in years to come.

This was the first ever joint disaster response drill between the two nations, and was the ultimate demonstration of a "partnership" of two countries in collaboration. This partnership represents our multinational/joint efforts as we "prepare in calm to respond in crisis," proving that PP15 and the Mercy are ambassadors of peace and goodwill, providing hope to those in the Pacific "Ring of Fire."

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